Sick Day Protocol Card

Step-by-step guide for managing common childhood illnesses at home

When Your Child Gets Sick: Step by Step

1. Check temperature (rectal for under 3 months, oral or ear for older kids)
2. Assess hydration: tears when crying, wet diapers every 6–8 hrs, moist mouth
3. Push fluids: breast milk, electrolyte solution, bone broth, water
4. Let mild fevers run (fever is the immune system working, not the enemy)
5. Rest in a cool, comfortable room with light clothing
6. Monitor symptoms every 2–4 hours; write down temps and fluid intake
7. Comfort measures: cool washcloth on forehead, warm bath for congestion
8. Call your pediatrician if symptoms worsen or don't improve in 48–72 hours

When to Watch vs. When to Act

ILLNESS	WATCH AT HOME	CALL DOCTOR	GO TO ER
Common cold	Runny nose, mild cough, low-grade fever < 3 days	Symptoms > 10 days, fever returns after improving, ear pain	Difficulty breathing, blue lips, can't keep fluids down
Fever	100.4–102°F with normal behavior, eating/drinking OK	102°F+ lasting > 48 hrs, child under 2 years with fever > 24 hrs	Fever in infant < 3 months, 105°F+, seizure, stiff neck, unresponsive
Ear infection	Mild tugging at ear, no fever, still playing	Ear pain > 48 hrs, fever with ear pain, fluid draining from ear	Sudden hearing loss, severe pain with high fever, swelling behind ear
Stomach bug	Mild vomiting/diarrhea, keeping some fluids down	Vomiting > 24 hrs, diarrhea > 3 days, blood in stool	Signs of dehydration (no tears, sunken eyes, no urine 8+ hrs), severe abdominal pain

ILLNESS	WATCH AT HOME	CALL DOCTOR	GO TO ER
Croup	Mild barky cough, no stridor at rest	Stridor at rest, cough worsening over 3+ days, drooling	Severe breathing difficulty, blue/gray skin, can't speak or cry

IMPORTANT

Fever thresholds by age: Under 3 months with ANY fever (100.4°F+) = ER immediately. Ages 3–6 months with fever 102°F+ = call doctor same day. Over 6 months with fever 104°F+ or lasting > 48 hours = call doctor. Any age with fever + stiff neck, rash, or seizure = ER.